

The Pattern of Discipleship

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Date: 30 April 2017

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. It's great to see you here. What a lovely day. Thank you to all who've participated so far in our service. Could I ask you to grab your Bibles? It's so important that we have God's Word out in front of us. So whether that's a paper copy or you scroll down in your phone or iPad, whatever it is you do, then make every effort to get the Scriptures open in front of you. And Luke chapter 10 and verses 38 to halfway through chapter 11 is where we are this morning. You should have received hopefully a sermon outline as you came in. That's going to be quite important for this morning. So if you don't have one, put your hand in the air that you just don't care and Al McIntosh will get one to you. But why don't we still ourselves as we come to this wonderful portion of Luke's Gospel that we've been in for quite a while. And let's take just a moment in our Martha world just to have a moment of Mary's stillness. Will we do that and we'll pray as we come to God's Word this morning. Let's pray.

Our Father, we would thank you for this morning. And we would ask that as we come to your words now that you would help us to still ourselves, to still our hearts. Father, you would help us to focus our minds and to be ready to both receive and meet with you, we pray in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Well, to get us thinking this morning, if you had to sum up your life at present in one word, what would that word be? Why don't you just take 10 seconds, turn to your neighbor. What is that one word that you're thinking of that describes your life right now?

Okay, it's 10 seconds. Put your hands up. Here's a little case study this morning. Put your hands up if that word was the word busy. Come on, show of hands. How many of us that was the word busy describes our life just now? Right in the air. So just have a look around and take that in. Because we are a busy people. You can put your hands down now. We are a busy people. It's one of the buzzwords of our day, isn't it? Our generation busy. We are always, always busy. Everybody's busy. Everyone I talk to is busy. Even in pastoral ministry, when you go to minister's conferences, how do people respond? How are you? Oh, I'm busy.

We're always busy. In fact, I heard someone the other day refer to our always on world. Our phones are never off. Our alerts are always going. Our minds are always active. We live in an always on busy world. Well, here's the question that I want us to think about this morning.

[2 : 54] What are we busy with? There are, I don't know if you've ever stopped to think about this, there are 10,080 minutes in a week. Just think to yourself, what do you fill them with? What are you busy doing? Here's the challenge that God's word would bring to us this morning as those who are following Jesus Christ? Are we making room in our busy lives for the things which matter most?

Now, if you remember last week, we said that we're in this kind of school of discipleship portion of Luke's gospel. And the big question that Luke's trying to get his readers to think through is what does it mean to follow this King? What does it mean to follow Jesus Christ?

And last week, we looked at the parable of the Good Samaritan, and we saw that following Jesus involves sacrificially and compassionately loving and caring for those round about you as those who have been made in God's very image. But this week, if last week's question was, or discipleship lesson rather, was an external lesson, well, this week Luke gives us an internal one. And it's no accident that he's put those two right together next to each other. There's an external part to following Jesus, and there's an internal part. In other words, it's not all about doing, it's about being and knowing.

What are the things which matter most? That's the question that we should be asking right about now. Well, we're going to see two things this morning that should mark our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ.

What are they? Sitting and listening and stopping and praying. In other words, what will a disciple be marked by?

[4 : 51] Well, he or she will be marked by firstly, devotion, and secondly, dependence. And if you've got your Bibles there, we pick up the narrative at verse 38 of chapter 10, if you've got it there.

And Jesus has been welcomed into Martha's house. And Luke tells us this story. And as he tells us this story, the focus of his story isn't as much on Jesus as it is actually on these two sisters.

Do you notice that there? Firstly, who do we get in the story? Martha, the host. How would she describe her life in one word? Well, she's busy.

She's busy. What's she doing? She's busy being a good host. Now, you can picture her, can't you, in the scene? She's chopping the veg. She's cooking the stew. She's setting the table.

She's got Jamie Oliver's 15-minute meals out in front of her. All of that summed up in those words that Luke gives us at verse 40, if you see. Much serving.

[5 : 58] This is Martha. Much serving. That's what she's doing. But it's not what she's doing that seems to be the problem, but how she's doing it. And the way that Luke tells us the story here, it gives us the clues that we need to be able to ascertain the true state of Martha's heart.

How is she? Verse 40. Distracted. Here we have a distracted sister, which I think we are led to understand means a little more than she was just a little bit flustered as she was going about her chores.

It's more than that. She is overwhelmed. She's bothered and she's burdened. And do you see how it comes out?

It spills out in her language. Do you see it there? Such a blessing for us in our lives, isn't it? That what makes it to our tongues is just simply a byproduct of what's going on in our hearts.

What does she do? Verse 40. She confronts Jesus. Now you can picture her. She throws off her apron. She throws the dish towel on the floor.

[7 : 08] Lord. Notice what she calls him there. It's not that Mary doesn't know who he is. Lord. Lord. Do you not care?

Do you not care that Mary is doing nothing? Well, I'm doing absolutely everything. Now we have to say there's a little bit of us that understands what she's saying there, doesn't it? How is Jesus going to respond?

What's he going to say? Good point, Martha. Come on, Mary. You need to up your game here. No. What does he say? Would you notice the grace in Jesus' response to her? Martha, Martha.

Gentle yet deeply concerned words for this woman. Verse 41. Jesus, he sees her heart.

And he sees that she is anxious. And she's troubled about so many different things. But the cares of this world, the pressures of life, what are they doing?

[8 : 12] They're coming into her heart. They're choking her joy. And they're dragging her away from a right devotion to Jesus, her master. You see, it's not that the stuff that Mary is doing is bad.

It's just that those things are pulling her away from what is best. Kevin DeYoung, he writes this about this passage.

Martha is so busy with dinner that she's giving Jesus her spiritual leftovers. Here's Martha. She's busy. And then we get the other sister, don't we?

We get Mary. And where is she in this picture? She's sitting with the right heart at Jesus' feet.

She's like Greyfriars Bobby. You go and you look at his statue just up Northbridge. I pass it every day and I stop to read it this week. You see the plaque that reads, Here is the dog that faithfully followed his master.

[9 : 16] This is Mary. She's there. She's at his feet. Because we need to understand that in Jesus Christ, she's found somebody who's captivated her heart. That's why she's at the feet of Jesus.

And what is she doing at the feet of Jesus? She's listening to his teaching. The very words from her master's mouth.

You see, Jesus hasn't just captivated her heart. He's captivated her mind. And what does Jesus say about her? Some of the most beautiful words I think Jesus says about a human being here.

What has she chosen? The good portion. The good portion. It's kind of psalmy language.

The language of the psalms about close fellowship with God being the most desirable thing in one's life. Mary has chosen the good portion and Jesus commends her for it.

[10:18] Jesus commends her for her undistracted devotion to him and his words. And I think that as we read this story this morning, we are invited.

As we look at this woman here, we are invited to ask ourselves as followers of Jesus, which one is your heart? Help us think that through.

Let me ask us a couple of diagnostic heart questions. Firstly, do you detect the marks of Martha?

Do you see them in your own life? Do you see anxiety clouding your heart?

Do you find yourself distracted by the pressures of life? And do you notice it firstly in your actions? And particularly, do you notice it in your words?

The words in your texts? And the tone of your emails, how you reply to people, and the things that you post on Facebook and Twitter, do you notice this in your words?

[11:24] And maybe even those internal words, those kind of mental manuscripts that we always write, the internal things that never actually make it to print. Do you see the marks of Martha in your life this morning?

It's even possible to be distracted, isn't it, as we serve in church? Things of this world that we allow them to cloud us as we serve in here?

Do you detect the marks of Martha? And secondly, do you desire the heart of Mary?

It's a beautiful irony in this story that the one that's held up to us here never actually says a word.

What did she do? Well, let me just draw your attention to two words.

Mary firstly chose. That's the verb there. She chose. She presumably made the decision. And amongst all the other things that could have occupied her time, all the things that could have taken her attention and drawn her away, she decides to choose to sit at her Lord's feet and listen to his words.

[12:34] And according to Jesus, Mary chose that which was good. It was good. I'm sure if you'd asked her at this point, Mary, do you need to spend time with Jesus?

Do you need to spend time listening to him? She would have looked at you puzzled. And she would have replied, No, I do not have to do it. I get to do it. And the question for us this morning is, as disciples, as followers of this King, do we see that choosing to spend time, making the time, to be with our Lord, with our Bibles open, listening to his word every day, is good for us?

It's good for us. Just something practical. If you're looking for something to do this week, something I found really helpful is just to write the word, this is the good portion, on a post-it note, and stick it on the front of my Bible.

Because it reminds me, as I come to this every morning, that this isn't a duty, this is a delight. That I get to sit at the feet of my Lord and listen to his words every morning.

This is the good portion. Can I say what I found out quite transforming this week in my own life?

That this is the good portion, what a great thing to be reminded of, as we come to read our Bibles every morning.

[13:55] Before we move to Edinburgh, Alex and I used to live in Bristol. Lovely city. And in Bristol, there's this street called Muller Road.

And it's named after one of Bristol's most famous sons, George Muller. Don't even know anything about George Muller. I knew diddly-squat before I moved down to Bristol. But George Muller is a wonderful Christian man.

Because as well as being a pastor and a traveling preacher, he's most famous for founding a number of orphanages in and around Bristol and further seas as well. In fact, in his lifetime, I googled it this week, he pioneered the construction of five large orphan houses and he cared for 10,024 orphans.

This is George Muller. Do you see what a difference this faith made in his life? Now there's a busy man. Right? Busy man. And he wrote in his journal, he wrote, somebody asked him, how did he do all of it?

How did he do all of it and serve with a heart of joy? And he writes this in his diary. He says this.

Now this is wonderful if you want to listen to this. He said, I saw more clearly than ever that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was to have my soul happy in the Lord.

[15:14] It's another wonderful phrase. To have my soul happy in the Lord. That's Mary. She is thrilled with Jesus.

She is delighted with her master. There she is sitting at his feet, desperate for more of his words. You know, are we making room in our busy lives for the things which matter most? Are our lives as disciples, are they first they are, are they characterized by devotion? And secondly, as we move into chapter 11 this morning and this wonderful passage about prayer, we get the second mark of the true disciple.

Are our lives marked by dependence? Now look how we get into chapter 11 here. What does Luke tell us? He tells us that Jesus was praying. He was praying, which I don't know about you, but that always encourages me.

That Jesus, in amongst the busyness of his life and ministry, in amongst all the people, all the urgent situations that surrounded him, all the needy people that came to him, he made time and he made prayer, that is communion with his heavenly father.

[16:33] He made it an absolute priority in his life. And by including this here, I think Luke's lesson for us as we look on is that if dependent prayer was appropriate for the creator of the universe, then it's certainly appropriate for you who would try and follow him.

It encourages me. It challenges me. And his disciples, what do we get there? They look at him praying and they ask him, will you teach us to pray?

Which is a wonderful question. Teach us how to pray. Jesus gives them three big lessons in the school of prayer. Three big lessons that I found to be so practical this week, so helpful this week, so challenging this week, so transforming this week.

Three big lessons that I've got so much to teach us this morning as we follow after this king. You ready for them? First, big lesson, verses one to four. Jesus lays out for his disciples what they should pray.

Verse two, when you pray, say. Do you see this? He gives them the very words to say. And there's two axes, I think, to this prayer. There's the kind of God word axis and there's the you word axis.

[17:47] It starts with God and his glory before it moves to you and your needs. Wonderful lesson for us there that we'll come on to see in just a moment.

Firstly, let's consider the God word axis. Who is this God that they pray to? He's the all-powerful one. He's the all-knowing and all-present one.

He is the creator and sustainer of absolutely everything and he is a blind and he is a blindingly holy God. And what is his relationship to them and to us this morning?

Distant spectator? No. Ruthless dictator? No. Father. Jesus invites, and get your heads around this, his disciples to call this God Father.

It's the Greek word pater there. Now whatever the precise usage of that word was in this culture, surely the main point that Jesus is making is that the relationship between this God and his people is one of intimacy and access.

[18:57] That he is no cold and distant God. He is a gracious and a near Father. Now what an amazing mystery that is. That the almighty God would look on us and because of his son Jesus Christ and his shed blood on the cross that makes us right with our heavenly father, our God, that he adopts us and he calls us his sons and daughters.

Is it not a mind-boggling joy that the one we address in prayer and we get these two truths, firstly, that we come before him reverently because he is holy, that he is so far above us?

As I heard one person say it this week how we must be careful not to just simply address God as the God almighty. He is the God almighty. We must never lose that sense of reverence as to who he is and who we are.

He is a holy God. But secondly, the second truth to grasp is that we come before him because of Jesus. We come before him confidently and we can call him our father.

Two wonderful truths that we must never let go of. Oh, in our Christian lives may we never get past the jaw-dropping effect of that one word.

[20:23] He is our father. And so the only response to us as we get that right is hallowed be your name. hallowed.

It's the cry of a transformed heart that beats for God's glory and says, God, because you are so great I want to see your name in lights.

I want to see your name made great in my life, in our lives, and in our lands. I want people up and down our nation, in our city to see your greatness, God.

Would they see it? And would your kingdom come? Would your rule and your reign, would it come here? Would you save people in our city to yourself as they hear and respond to the message of Jesus Christ?

And not just in our city and in our land, but in the world. Do you see the truth for us there? that knowing God rightly, it feels worship, it feels mission, and it feels prayer.

[21 : 30] This is our God. So Jesus rightly, as he gives them this pattern of prayer, he begins by drawing their gaze to God.

As if to say, it starts with him, it doesn't start with you. He is the orbit in which you are operating, not the other way around. Once they have their vision of who God is, God their Father, once they have that vision refined and clarified, then they can begin to see themselves rightly.

And we get the other axis to this prayer. Firstly, the God word axis. Secondly, the you word axis.

What does Jesus teach us teach his disciples about themselves?

Well, as we've already sang earlier, and this is the reason we sang it, he teaches them this profoundly simple yet wondrously profound lesson about the Christian life, and it's that we need God.

We need God. They need God. There's three aspects of their need that Jesus outlines here in this prayer. firstly, they need a bread.

[22 : 48] Do you see it there? The daily things that they need for life. Jesus is teaching them to stop and reflect that, God, you are the one who makes the sun rise every morning.

God, you are the one who sustains me and provides for me. You see, Jesus is teaching them here to have a heart stance of dependence and thankfulness.

Lord, that Sunday happened today, not just because it rolled around from Saturday, but Sunday happened today because you decided it should happen today. And you have got your purposes to fulfill today for your glory.

That's why it happened today. I wonder if you find yourselves thankful this morning. Do we find ourselves aware of God's goodness to us every day, every moment of every day, or have we grown accustomed to his mercies?

As the late John Stott once said, thankfulness is a soil in which pride does not easily grow. Father, thank you.

[24 : 06] They need bread. Secondly, they need forgiveness. They need to be examining their own hearts, confessing their failures and sin and shortcomings against their holy father, and recognizing that he is gracious, and he is merciful, and knowing that because of Jesus and his shed blood that speaks a better word for us, that he is faithful and just to forgive their sin.

And you see how Jesus so tightly knits here the relationship with God to the relationships with others. Because knowing that they have been forgiven much by God, it should affect how they relate to others, that they seek to forgive others, that they seek to be right with others, that they seek to deal with issues that arise with others.

You know, let me ask you this morning, is there anyone that you need to get right with? Is there bitterness brewing in your own heart against another brother or sister?

Is there unconfessed sin in the chambers of your heart that is holding your back in your walk with the Lord? We need forgiveness. And thirdly, they need protection.

It's a confession that Lord, I know my own sinful heart, I know as the old hymn says, I know that I am prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. I know my weaknesses, and so Lord, I need you by your spirit living in me to direct and to guide my every step and my every thoughts and my every action today.

[25 : 50] Would you deliver me from evil? I need you, Heavenly Father, I need you. Before we came to Brunfield five odd years ago, Alex and I, we spent a bit of time working in a Christian hospital, Malawi, and every morning we used to have these team meetings at a ridiculous o'clock in the morning.

We used to start by reading a portion of God's word together, and we would sing together. Now, you can imagine coming from a British background into that. It was a bit weird singing together. But we sung together, and I used to think I could hit a note, but I heard these guys sing, and I thought, oof, right, I can't hit a note.

But every morning we used to sing the same song. We used to sing, give me, power, Lord Jesus, give me power, Lord Jesus, give me power, every hour to be strong.

O, give me power, and I used to repeat about six times. Now, I'm all up for repeating choruses, but that one got a bit repetitive. But I sat there, convicted, because I looked into my own heart, and I thought, Graham, have you ever sung that song, really?

Have you ever acknowledged that you need God? Have you ever acknowledged that you do not have the ability to guide your way through life? You do not have all the answers. And in fact, the cry, if I'm honest, the song of my own heart was, I'm okay, Lord Jesus.

[27 : 23] I've got the power. I've got the power for every hour to keep me strong. And I wonder if that is true for us this morning that we rate our ability to navigate our ways through the ups and downs of life.

I've been praying this week for us that we would see that we do not have the power. Individually, in our own lives, we would see our need of God, we would see that we need him, and corporately as a church, that we would see that we need God.

how often do we think we're okay because we can put on nice events, and we can make nice coffee, and we can do nice Bible studies, we can function as a church, we can get by.

But my prayer this week has been, oh Lord, would you rid us of our complacency? As a church community here, would you forgive us for the times that we think in our busy lives, that we can run from thing to thing, and task to task, and think that they are excuses for not stopping to acknowledge that we need Jesus.

you. Do you feel that in your own heart? Lord, I need you. Wednesday the 10th of May, prayer meeting in the upstairs hall. We're going to pray for our nation, the UK.

[28 : 39] We put that together about six months ago, not really knowing what would happen, but what a time to pray for our country. Brexit, snap election, we need to pray. We need to pray to our great gods. Come, Wednesday the 10th of May, let's pray together as a community, and acknowledge that we need him.

Martin Luther, famously wrote, I have so much to do today that it leaves me with little option but to spend the first three hours of this day in prayer. You know, one thing I've tried to do this week, and I'll invite you to do it, is I've just printed, well, just try and make the Lord's Prayer the focus of my prayer times this week.

and I've just printed it on the back of the sheet. Maybe you want to just, this week, make that the focus of your prayer, just slip it inside your Bible, come to it every morning, and I found it such a realigning experience to pray this prayer and to stop after every line.

That these are the words my Lord gave us, his followers, to pray. These are his words. And this is how I should be praying. Heavenly Father, I need you. That is what they should pray, and we'll rattle through these last two.

I'm aware of time. Secondly, verses 1 to 10, Jesus lays out to his disciples how they should pray. And he tells them this parable, and it's about a host who receives an unexpected guest at what you must be able to say is an ungodly hour.

[30 : 03] And he's unprepared for this guest. Now, in this culture, hospitality is a big deal. And so a first century host would do absolutely everything in their power to offer their guest the very best that they could give them.

In a village, hospitality is not just an individual thing, it's a corporate thing. Everybody in the community was obliged to help each other be a good host. And so it was the duty of this neighbor, no matter how inconvenient, no matter what the hour, his duty to get out of bed in order to help his neighbor.

None of Jesus' listeners would refuse to get out of bed. That is the point. No matter what time it was, no matter what the cry was, to help a neighbor in need. So when Jesus asks this question, which of you has a friend who wouldn't act like this in a situation like that?

The disciples are thinking to themselves, well, none of us have a friend like that. All of our friends would help. Well, says Jesus, if that neighbor disturbed and hassled as he may be, if he will rise and respond to the request from his neighbor and needs, then how much more will God rise to answer your prayers when you knock at his door and ask?

Big point from the parable, that God is not a begrudging and inconvenience grantor. God is a willing and ready giver. If your friend will answer your cry for help because you were bold in asking, how much more will God answer your cry for help because you are his child?

[31 : 44] So what does Jesus invite his disciples to do here? Ask. Ask. In line of what he's outlined to them to pray, ask and do it boldly.

Your friends may reluctantly give you what you need. But how much more as God's child will he gladly give you everything that you need? You may well be an inconvenience to your neighbor. And if he answers, how much more will God your good father be willing to open up the door to you? This is how you're to ask, says Jesus.

You're to ask boldly and you're to ask confidently. And thirdly, verses 11 to 13, Jesus lays out for them why they should pray. And again, it's this how much more logic.

There's a bit of humor in there as well, isn't it? If you earthly fathers, if you know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your good and perfect father not give his children things that will be bad or dangerous for them, but give them the things that are good for them?

[32 : 50] And to see it outlined there, most notably, his very presence with us through the Holy Spirit. And as we close this morning, let's maybe bring a few of those strands together and bring ourselves back to that question that we asked at the outset.

In our always-on culture, are we making room in our busy lives for the things which matter most? As disciples of Jesus Christ, are we making time in our busy lives every day to sit and listen and to stop and pray?

Are our lives, are they marked by undistracted devotion and by unashamed dependence? And I thought it'd be great for us this morning, just as we close, to close by saying the Lord's Prayer together as we read it here.

But before we do that, why don't we just take a moment before we rush into our Martha world, just to still our hearts before the Lord and let's respond to his words as we've heard it this morning.

Let's pray together.

[34 : 11] Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation. Amen.